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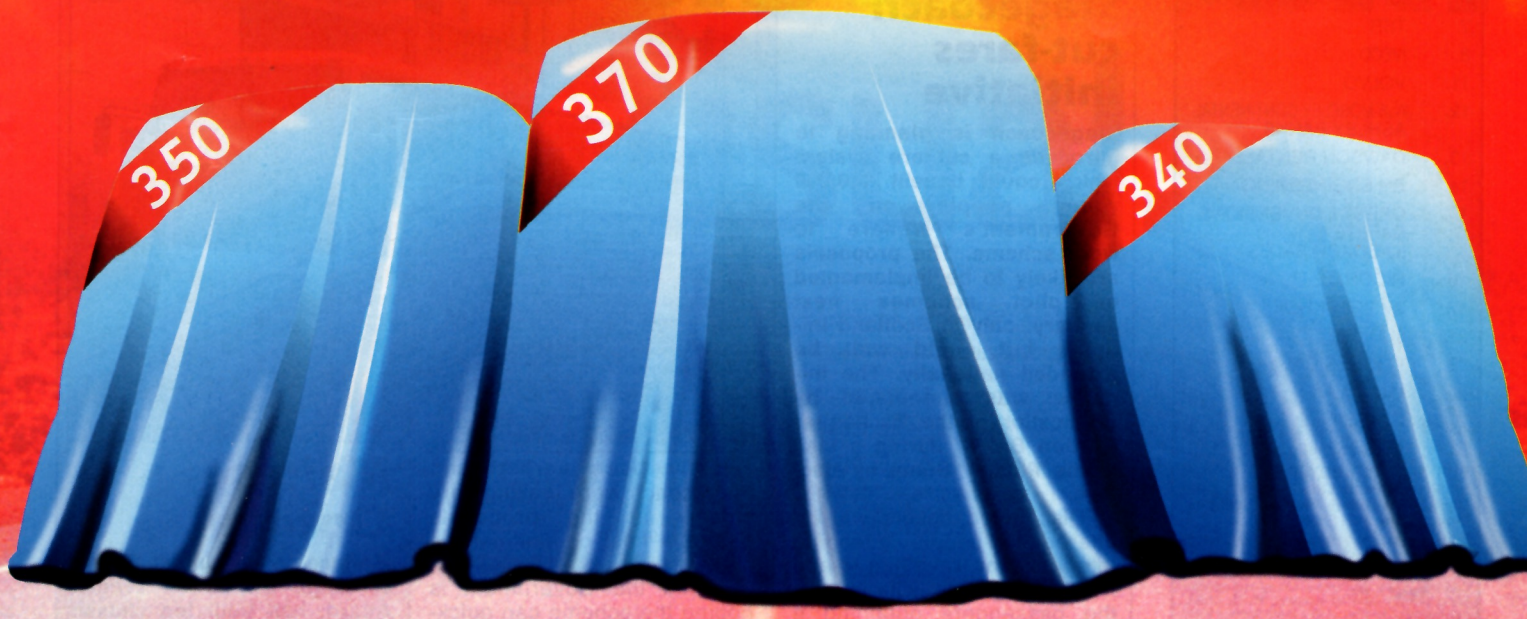

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News

New for Bostock's is this Scania K113CRB Van Hool Alizee.

Holmeswood buy Bostock's

The Aspinall family, proprietors of Holmeswood Coaches of Ormskirk, have established a new company called Bostock's Coaches Ltd to acquire the assets and goodwill of E.J.Bostock & Sons, trading as Bostock's Tours & Travel from the administrators. Bostock's had been trading in Cheshire since 1919.

Speaking following the acquisition, Colin Aspinall, a director of both companies, stressed that Bostock's would not be merged within the existing Holmeswood fleet but would continue as a separate concern with its own identity and livery. 'Bostock's has been a family run business and will remain so. Mark and Jane Bostock are very heavily involved in the new company,' he said.

Included in the deal are 32 coaches, a mixture of Bedfords, Leylands and Volvos, and a lease on the buildings at Congleton. All of the operating staff have transferred to the new company. The three staff, including Jane Bostock, who previously worked for Bostock's Tours have joined Holmeswood Coaches Ltd in order that the tour programme can gain the protection of the parent company's bonding facility. 'It is not our intention to run a joint tour programme,' said Colin, 'The Bostock's tour programme will stand on its own feet with a separate brochure.'

Already a new 49/53 seat Scania K113CRB Van Hool Alizee has been purchased and liveried for Bostock's, primarily for use on the tour programme. 'We've got a commitment to bring the fleet more in line with our targets at Holmeswood,' said Colin. 'There will be investment in the business and the new Scania is a vision of where we are heading.'

The company has been granted a transitional licence by the North Western Traffic Area Office, and Colin praised the helpfulness of the staff there. He was also very complimentary about the role of the Neville Russell, Chartered Accountants of Regent House, Heaton Lane, Stockport, Cheshire, and commented, 'I would like to thank Tim Askham and his team from Neville Russell, the administrators, who did everything possible to make the transfer of the company happen.'

The acquisition is the latest stage of a remarkable expansion for the Ormskirk company which has tripled in size over the past two years. Bostocks' 32 coaches take the total fleet strength to 74.

Stagecoach cut-fares initiative

Stagecoach is planning to introduce a cut-fare system which could benefit 140,000 young people on the Government's Welfare to work scheme. The proposals are likely to be implemented in pilot schemes next January, only in Scotland initially, but could well be extended nationally. The initiative was announced by Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown during a visit to the Paisley South by-election.

Discounted tickets will be offered to people attending interviews or travelling to and from work. This will involve the passengers obtaining a warrant or voucher from their prospective or full time employer which contains the required information for acceptance by bus drivers. Press reports have indicated Stagecoach is to reduce fares by 50% for those on the Welfare to Work scheme but a spokesman for the company claimed no definite figure had actually been agreed and Stagecoach were looking very closely at the proposals before a final commitment is made.

While the Government is hoping the scheme can quickly be implemented nationally, Stagecoach said some local initiatives were already being investigated and its Southern subsidiaries, under the direction of Russell McDonald, were already negotiating for similar concessions involving students as well as the unemployed and people travelling to or from their workplace.

Maltese Optimal

Maltese coach builder Scarnif of Luqa, owned by Francis Attard, has built ten chassis which it's in the process of bodying for service on Gozo. Branded Optimal, the chassis are 11 metre and steel sprung with power coming from a Cummins LT10 engine mounted vertically in-line driving through a Turner gearbox. The first coach has now been completed and is seen here prior to delivery.

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News

Volvo buy Carrus

Volvo Bus Corporation is continuing its policy of purchasing strategically suitable coachbuilding companies with the acquisition of Finnish bus and coach builder Carrus. Volvo and Carrus owner Ilmari Mustonen, reached an agreement for Volvo to acquire all the shares in parent company Carrus Oy and it will take over formally at the turn of the year. Carrus also had two subsidiaries producing specialised vehicles, Kiiokori Oy and Sammutin Oy. These will remain in the ownership of the Mustonen family.

Under its new owners, Carrus will retain its name and continue under present managing director Harry Strom. Renowned for producing bodies in stainless steel, the company is to continue developing and manufacturing bodies for a range of chassis and will not be confined to Volvo's own products. In 1996 the company produced 452 bodies at its three sites, Lieto, Tammerfors and Vanda, and is on target for a similar number this year. Around 60% of its production is based on Volvo chassis and an additional 200 bodies are being built internationally by Volvo subsidiaries under licence.

As a result of the acquisition, Volvo is to create a Nordic Business Area by restructuring its Nordic operations. The new Area will be based on three units: Nordic Chassis, headed by Leif Andersson; Saffle Karosseri, headed by Stefan Guttman; and Carrus, headed by Harry Strom. Anders Galfvensjo, currently head of Volvo Bus International, will be responsible for the Nordic Business Area.

Bowens Error

Last week's press release from Bowens Group stated that the enlarged fleet was just under 100 vehicles with four retail travel outlets. This was incorrect. The number of travel outlets is actually 40.

Keeping Buses Moving

Keeping Buses Moving is the name for new guidance launched last week by Transport Minister Gavin Strang. The guidance sets out measures to help reduce delays, improve reliability and to make bus travel more attractive to the general public. It is aimed at local authorities and others implementing traffic management measures to give buses priorities on urban roads.

The publication gives advice on: withflow and contraflow bus lanes; bus only streets; bus priorities at junctions; bus advance areas; and camera enforcement of bus lanes. Copies are available from the Stationery Office, priced £26. The code is ISBN 0-11-551914-9.

Speaking from West Yorkshire, where Dr Strang had visited a number of initiatives, including the Leeds guided bus system, he said: 'We must aim for better and more reliable bus services to draw more people back to public transport. The Leeds guided bus system has already saved over 500 car trips a week in and out of the city. This is a step in the right direction. It shows if we get bus services and systems right, then people will use them.'

Coach Rally '98

The 1998 UK Coach Rally will be held at Brighton on 25/26 April. Coach Displays Ltd, organisers of the rally, were delighted by the response received at the NEC which enabled them to meet with competitors and exhibitors. Much of the exhibition space is already booked and the event could be larger and better than this year. Part of the event is the gala dinner following the Saturday programme. All competitors, visitors and exhibitors are invited to attend. For more details about participating in the rally contact, Tel: 0181 581 0049. Potential exhibitors should contact Tel: 01926 888123.

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Rising Italian market

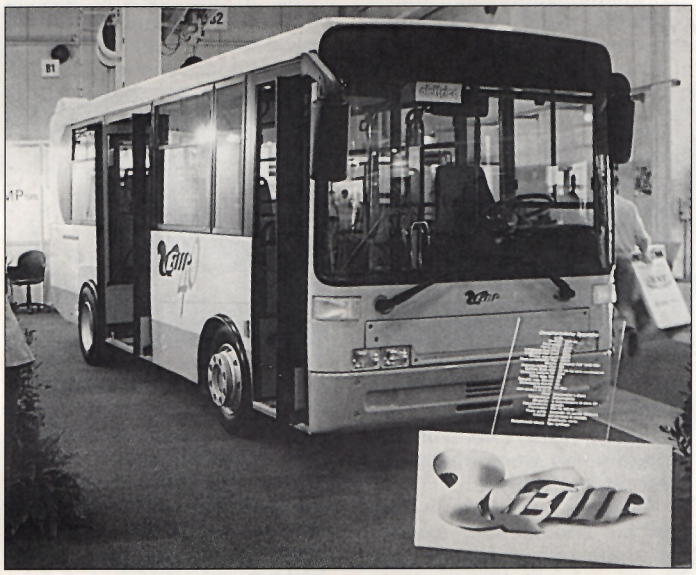
The latest products of the Italian bus and coach industry were on display in the beautiful city of Verona from 27 to 30 October. There is a large and modern fairground on the outskirts of the city. The Show was held in one hall, about 70% of the size of Hall 5 at the NEC. Immediately outside, there was a large parking area with about 25 demonstrators. This was a popular facility, with vehicles coming and going all day on brief road tests.

Inside the hall, there was a good selection of vehicle manufacturers, along with component and service suppliers. There were several exhibitors offering spare parts, including re-manufactured engines. One of the more surprising was an enterprising man who had come along with a lathe and seemed to be demonstrating that he could make any part in a matter of minutes! There were no travel trade exhibitors.

The total Italian market is likely to reach around 3,200 units in 1997. Of those, about 2,500 will be over 7.0m and they are expected to consist of approximately 1,000 city buses, 1,000 interurban coaches and 500 luxury touring coaches.

Italy suffered not only from the recession which hit all the European markets about three to four years ago, but also the major domestic problem of investigations into allegations of corruption in the public sector. During the height of these enquiries, many managers minimised the risk of any implications by simply ceasing to replace vehicles!

Fortunately, the market is now recovering reasonably well, but as one senior executive said, the government really needs to invest in 1,500 new buses each year for the next ten years if average age profiles are to come down significantly. Where have we heard that before? Although the Show was weighted more towards interurban and touring coaches, there were several interesting buses. Until the introduction of EC wide competitive tendering in the public sector, Italian city buses had to comply with the strict design standards and layouts laid down by Federtrasporti. Those were responsible for flat glass screens and distinctive features like the long teardrop windows at each front corner.

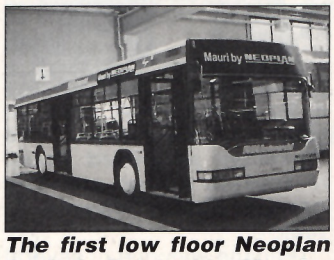


EMP exhibited this neat little all-electric bus which has British-built Wavedriver equipment by Powergen. Cacciamali built the bodywork.

Iveco was one of the first to break the mould, with the stylish CityClass. Several were running in Verona and, with their lower overall height, looked much more modern and inviting than the older buses. They all had electronic destination equipment which was not set permanently for the final destination, but also gave a running display of intermediate stops. The colouring was dark orange on black and was definitely easier to read than the yellow dot-matrix systems in this country, even in strong sunlight.

Inside the show, Iveco had a CityClass with a number of interesting features in the driving compartment. The buttons to operate the three sets of doors were mounted on a palette which was level with the steering wheel and therefore close to the driver's right hand. The palette was supported by a stalk projecting from the dash board. It was a neat arrangement, but the location would have interfered with ticket collecting equipment in this country.

The second largest domestic bus manufacturer, Breda Menarinibus, chose not to attend, but there is growing competition in the market. Renault, another absentee, has had reasonable success with the R312 in Italy. EvoBus had a large stand with a comprehensive mix of Mercedes-Benz and Setra models.



The first low floor Neoplan for Italy finished by Mauri.

In the face of Iveco and major international competitors, the smaller Italian bus builders have chosen different strategies. De Simon, an old established company, is working jointly with Van Hool, fitting the latter's low floor A300 models with Italian interior trim, seating, etc. Production is running at around one a week but De Simon is confident that this will rise. The company is also supplying interurban bodywork on a variety of chassis and has a joint venture with Rocar in Romania, which takes kits from Italy.

Mauri is another old established builder and has started to collaborate with Neoplan on low floor buses. The first of the joint products, again largely built by Neoplan but trimmed in Italy, was in the Show.

Neoplan has also sold a small number of interurban double deckers, with are popular on longer commuter runs, because of the high seating capacity. A double decker is limited to 100kph on main roads and motorways, but an articulated interurban is restricted to 70kph.

Giovanni Tosi of Neoplan Italia described himself not just as a salesman but as one of a very small number of bus and coach enthusiasts in Italy. He has five old vehicles, but says it is very difficult to run them, because the authorities do not recognise the private owner of preserved vehicles, like they do here. He was very envious of the major rallies, and particularly the running days held in this country, and is hopeful that the Italian regulations will be eased.

He told me that most interurban services are put out on a contract basis by the regional authorities. They are tending to prefer private operators, because they need less subsidy, but there is now growing interest in trying to cut the number of operators by forming larger groups. The hope is that they will be more efficient and will require lower levels of subsidy, both to buy vehicles and run services.

Autodromo is rapidly changing towards being a manufacturer of complete integral vehicles, although a few interurban bodies are still built on Iveco and MAN chassis. The range includes two axle and articulated trolleybuses, which are still quite popular in a number of Italian

Show Report

cities. It is very noticeable how Italian designers try, in a variety of ways, and generally to good effect, to break away from the traditional box shape.

Cacciamali has a comprehensive range, starting on the Iveco Daily and EuroMidi and working upwards. They also have an impressive range of low floor vehicles, starting with models only 6.0m and 6.73m long. Power comes from an Iveco 4 cylinder 3.9 litre engine, driving through a Voith Midimat automatic gearbox to the rear axle.

The next model up the range is 8.9m long and has a 5.9 litre Iveco engine mounted in the offside rear corner, driving through a ZF 4HP500 automatic gearbox to a portal rear axle. This arrangement allows a single width doorway ahead of the front axle, and two double width doors either side of the rear axle. Cacciamali has its own distinctive frontal style which looks even better on the slightly larger 10.36m long TCN105.

On the next stand, EMP displayed a neat little battery-electric bus with Cacciamali bodywork. EMP stands for Electric Motive Power which gave the game away. The power pack is British and was provided by the Wavedriver subsidiary of Powergen. There is quite a weight penalty, 9,800kg complete, but the prototype has a maximum speed of 60kph and a range of 94km on a full charge, at an average speed of 40kph. It can be recharged at stops although an 80% recharge will take up to 90 minutes. The maximum capacity of the 7.2m long vehicle is 39 passengers plus the driver.

There is strong interest in this type of vehicle in Italy, where many of the most ancient towns have very narrow central streets. There is great concern for the environment. Small electric buses offer both manoeuvrability and total cleanliness.

Most of Italy's interurban and touring coach manufacturers were at the Show. Iveco's own EuroClass is complimented by the even more luxurious TopClass from the Orlandi subsidiary. I saw several of the former on the road and they certainly look distinctive.

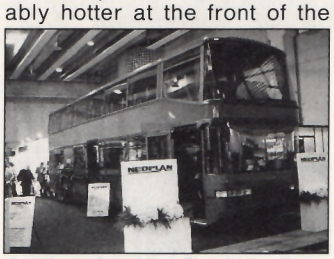
It was good to see Padane coming back to health. The legendary Italian builder went into liquidation early in 1996 and just ticked over until a consortium of fourteen operators bought the company and reopened it in August this year. Between them, they own over 1500 Padane bodies.

Some detail changes have been made to the classic lines of the touring coach body, but it is still instantly recognisably as Padane. One exhibit was a complete running skeleton, showing the stainless steel structure, which is strong and

A surprising visitor outside was the little all-electric Dutch-built Spykstaal.

corrosion free. Two completed examples were beautifully finished internally.

Features includes a two part air conditioning system. The main one cools the passenger compartment. It is supplemented by a secondary system which works only at the front of the coach. This can be used either by the driver when the vehicle is empty, or to supplement the main system, because Padane engineers have found that temperatures are invariably hotter at the front of the



A Neoplan decker used on interurban services. The maximum permitted speed is 100kph, but no standing passengers are allowed.

vehicle.

Padane was one of several builders exhibiting interurban bodywork on Iveco's multipurpose EuroRider chassis. On their example, the main gangway could be reached in three quite easy steps from the ground. The floor was built so low onto the gangway that the wheelarches intruded about 150mm into the bodywork, but only the rearmost two rows of seats were built on plinths.

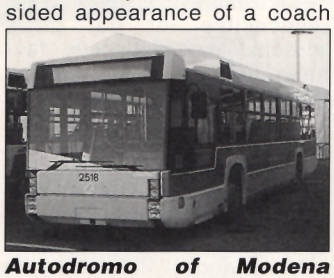
Another neat idea was the fitment of the reading lights and air conditioning louvres on two full length mouldings, mounted at roof level either side of a plain central panel, rather than on the underside of the racks. It gave a less cluttered appearance.

There is demand for disabled accessibility on interurban coaches. This is invariably done by locating a ramp in the second double width doorway and providing space for a wheel chair opposite the door. The was no indi-

This 10.36m long midibus by Caccimali has a full low floor. A 7.7 litre Iveco engine is mounted in line in the offside rear corner. (You can probably just see the palette with the door control gears at the right hand side of the main instrument panel).

cation of any manufacturer trying to board wheelchairs by the front entrance, opposite the driver, even on low floor city buses.

Dalla Via is another famous old coachbuilder with classic styling. They have successfully avoided the slab-sided appearance of a coach



Autodromo of Modena builds an extensive range of integral buses and trolley-buses.

by breaking the line beneath the main stretched steel side panels, and putting a chamfered top edge on the lower locker lids, wheel arch covers and other panels. They also offer a beautifully finished interurban body on the EuroRider.

Volvo works very closely with Barbi and takes all that company's output of luxury coachworks, on B12 chassis. The Italia 99 is another classic design which has been changed only marginally over the years.

Antonio Iannetta was appointed Managing Director of Volvo's importer earlier this year. He has already sold the first B12 with coachwork from Volvo's German subsidiary, Drogmoller, into the Italian market and also offers an interurban model, based on the B10B with bodywork by the Austrian Steyr subsidiary. He has ambitious plans to get Volvo into other sectors of the market, when the time is right.

Although the touring coach market is only half the size of ours, there is still strong competition from importers. Beulas and Irizar were there from Spain, on MAN and Scania respectively. Mercedes-Benz offered a choice of Mannheim and Turkish built coaches. Bova, Neoplan, Setra and Van Hool were also there.

There are also interesting smaller bodies on Iveco Daily and Mercedes Sprinter chassis. The two main builders are Tomassini and Sitcar. Dark glass effectively conceals the side pillars to give the impression of continuous glazing, contributing to the impression of a longer and lower vehicle.

Sitcar also offers a larger body on the MAN 11.220 chassis and it won my prize for the most oddly-presented vehicle in the show. Most of the coach was painted in an attractive yellowy-orange livery, but the driver's door was plain grey. At first, I thought there had been an accident on the way to the Show and that Sitcar had done well to fit a replacement. However, both the main passenger entrance and the secondary entrance were also plain grey. It looked most peculiar!

However, that comment should not detract from an excellent show. It was good to see the Italian industry looking so robust and healthy again.

This article would not be complete without a mention of Verona. It is a truly splendid old city with many magnificent buildings, and bridges over the river which winds round the centre. The most impressive feature was an enormous and ancient arena, right in the middle. The centre was quiet by 10.00pm, so it might not suit younger parties, but Verona is close to Lake Garda and only one and a half hours from Venice. It is well worth a tour.

By Doug Jack

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1992 DENNIS JAVELIN 320 11M
55 seats, power door, full soft trim, finished cream/red.
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1990 DAF SB 2300 JONCKHEERE DEAUVILLE 599
51 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., finished white/yellow/orange. ONE ONLY
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1987 SETRA 215HR
49 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., including SUTRAK AIR CONDITIONING, finished silver.
M.O.T MARCH 1998

1989 LEYLAND TIGER 260 12 DUPLE 320
53 reclining seats, finished cream/orange
M.O.T OCTOBER 1997

1981 DAF PLAXTON SUPREME
53 seats, power door, brown interior, finished brown/cream.
M.O.T JULY 1998

1987 DAF MB 230 DKFL 12M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500
51 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., finished white/orange stripe.
M.O.T. NOVEMBER 1997

1989 VOLVO B10M CAETANO ALGARVE
57 seats, finished all white.
M.O.T MARCH 1998

1982 LEYLAND TIGER DUPLE GOLDLINER IV
53 seats, recent retrim, courier seat, finished cream/duo brown.
M.O.T JULY 1998

1989 SCANIA K93 DUPLE 320
51 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., finished silver/blue.
M.O.T. MAY 1998

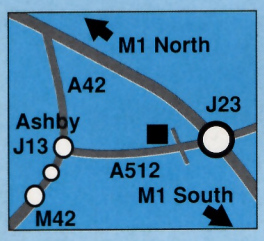
1987 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200
53 reclining seats, finished white with green/blue flash on sides.
M.O.T DECEMBER 1997

1989 VOLVO B10M CAETANO ALGARVE
53 seats, finished all white.
M.O.T MARCH 1998

MINIS

1987 FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA CARLYLE MK1 BODY
20 Bus type seats + 5 standeeze, full soft trim, radio, power door, finished all white
M.O.T. JUNE 1998

1987 MERCEDES 307D
12 seater, grey/red/orange striped moquette, overhead luggaage racks, radio/P.A. tape, finished white with lower blue band
M.O.T JANUARY 1998



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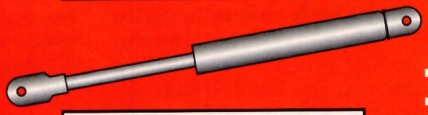

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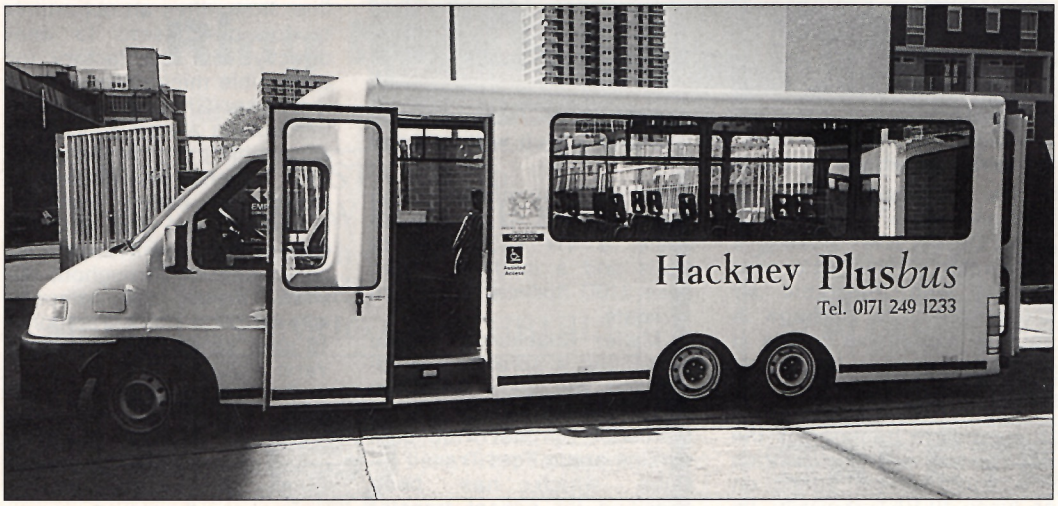
CTA '97

Annual Community Transport Exhibition at Blackpool



The Fiat Ducato based RoMoBus turned heads at Crowthorne and will be a major attraction at Blackpool.

The annual Community Transport exhibition and conference takes place between 13 - 15 November at the Norbreck Castle Hotel in Blackpool. The event, as usual, has been over-subscribed and the exhibition halls will once again be packed with accessible vehicles, seating, passenger lifts, safety equipment and a wealth of support services. In the past, Blackpool has seen the launch of some exciting new developments and this year looks like being no exception. The following preview aims to highlight some of the interesting features that make CTA's showpiece worth a visit.

No show would be complete without a vehicle launch and there are several to be found this year. Crystals Conversions is launching its Millennia, a Mercedes Vario based 33 seater which is a totally remodelled version of the coachbuilt Enterprise that the company acquired from Whittakers in the early 90s. It now features an all fibreglass body shell, tinted direct glazed windows, one piece coach rear end, and a unique integrated windscreen which utilises the original Mercedes item.

More new bodies are being shown by UVG Wales, almost all the new range featuring stainless steel framing. Five vehicles will be on the stand, all claiming to meet DiPTAC requirements and M2 standards for seating. They include an Iveco Daily 49.10 and Mercedes Vario 814D, both of which will be available as demonstrators after the event. UVG's other exhibits are a Mercedes Sprinter 412D, Ford Transit 230 and an LDV Convoy.

Anyone that couldn't get to Crowthorne in July can now see the much talked about RoMoBus from Rohill Bodies. The lowfloor triaxle design

A range of new body designs has been introduced by UVG Wales.

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Dawsonrentals would like to congratulate both winners and thank all those who entered the competition.

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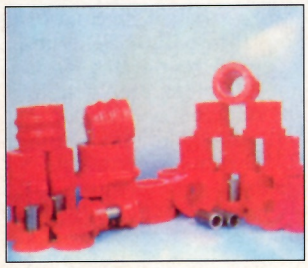

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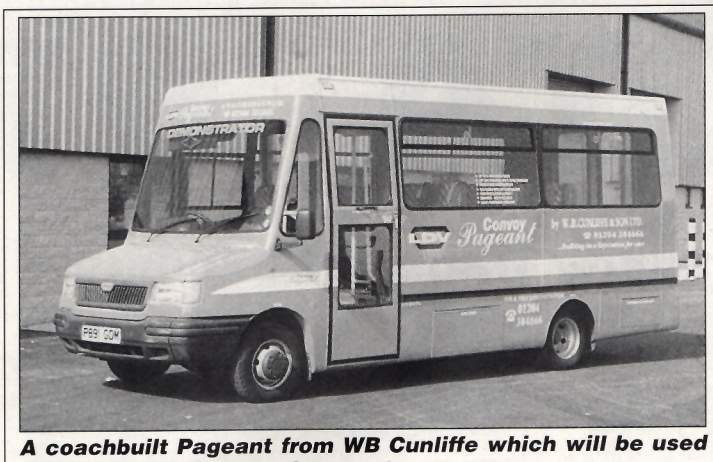

A coachbuilt Pageant from WB Cunliffe which will be used for demonstrations at the event.

allows easy access at the front and rear and is based on a Fiat Ducato cowl allied to a Drinkwater double axle rear chassis with lowerable air suspension. The package is not only impressive to look at - it carries a price tag of just £38,000.

Another stylish newcomer to accessible transport is the Robin Hood Vehicle Industries coachbuilt vehicle based on an Iveco 49.10 TurboDaily. Its appearance is similar to the Mercedes Vario based RH2000, offering a distinctive profile with the benefits of coachbuilt body widths and durability. It has 20 removable seats, space for eight wheelchairs, jack-knife doors with a low entrance step and a PLS underfloor lift.

Crest's new coachbuilt Mercedes 810D features an all aluminium body and is equipped with 24 seats plus a passenger lift. It will be supported by a pair of LDV Convoy accessible conversions with up to 16 seats. Frank Guy also has a coachbuilt Vario with up to 20 seats which will be shown alongside four other vehicles. They include one of the new 4.6 tonne VW LT46 minibuses, an Iveco Suzzara 49.10 with 15 seats, a VW LT35 with 12 seats and a medium wheelbase 310D Sprinter, also with 12 seats.

Mellor Coachcraft is also presenting a spread of product and will show an Iveco 59.12 accessible coach, a Mercedes Sprinter 410D conversion and a Ford Transit Hi-Cube which has been specified for patient transfer operation and is joining Ford's demonstration fleet. In addition, Mellor will be announcing news of its Mellordec tracking system.

Fiat is supporting the show with a 14 seat Ducato conversion by Whitacres. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Whitacres will also show an accessible Ducato for Osborne House amongst conversions on Iveco 45.10, Mercedes Sprinter, VW LT35 and an Iveco 59.12. Toyota's new Hiace Power Rider Long will be presented by Autotrim. This features a hydraulic tail lift and has space for up to three wheelchairs. It will be joined by an Autotrim conversion on a Nissan Vanette that can accommodate one or two wheelchairs and utilises manual ramps for access.

An accessible coachbuilt version of the RH2000, based on an Iveco 49.10, accommodates 20 seats or up to eight wheelchairs.

LDV will be showing six vehicles based on the Convoy. Five are conversions or coachbuilt examples supplied by various companies but the central attraction will be the new purpose built accessible minibus produced on LDV's Specialist Vehicles line. It signifies an opportunity for purchasers to deal directly with the factory for accessible minicoaches.

Pilcher-Greene will be introducing a new concept in accessibility for the Mercedes Vito which has generated interest for patient transfers in addition to the taxi-bus market. It will be available for demonstration throughout the show. Inside, the company will exhibit a more traditional 15 seat accessible Mercedes Vario 512D.

Seating companies are always prominent at the Blackpool exhibition and the products on show are relevant to big buses as well as minibuses. Restall Brothers, for instance, will show its new high-back, tip-up seat with a quickly detachable squab, designed for the wheelchair areas of lowfloor buses. Restall's latest seat has been tested at MIRA to M2 standards and is approved by Renault UK for fitment to its minibuses. The company will also be showing its Captain's seat which is aimed at low-capacity executive specification vehicles.

Richards & Shaw may show the Formaflex seat it first introduced at Crowthorne, although there will be a strong range of M2 tested seats in support, notably Xcelite and Monaco, in standard and high back versions. M2 seating will feature widely on all stands, including Rescroft, MTB and relative newcomers - Cogent Seating.

Seat coverings and trim are always topical for disabled transport providers and range from traditional moquettes and fabrics, as supplied by John Holdsworth & Co and Gaskell Textiles respectively, to the new synthetic materials such as TransAmbler from Wardle Storeys. All have their advantages across a wide range of applications.

Vehicle heating is particularly important in accessible transport where vehicles often have prolonged spells with

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JJ COACH SALES

1986 (DEC) SCANIA K92 PLAXTON 3500, 55 recliners
1986 LEYLAND CUB WADHAM STRINGER, 24 seater with rear taillift
1986 FREIGHTROVER HI-ROOF, 16 moquette seats
1984 FIAT IVECO ROBIN HOOD, 20 seater exec, rear toilet, servery and air conditioning
1984 MERCEDES 608, 21 retrimmed seats
1983 NEOPLAN JETLINER, 49 retrimmed seats, centre sunken toilet, all white
1983 BEDFORD YMT PLAXTON 3200, 53 seater
1983 DAF MB PARAMOUNT 3200, 53 recliners
1982 VOLVO B10M DUPLE GOLDLINER, 53 retrimmed seats
1982 MERCEDES 608 PLAXTON MINI SUPREME, 29 seater
1982 BEDFORD YMPS Duple Dominant II, 35 seater
1981 VOLVO B58 DUPLE DOMINANT II, 53 seats
1980 BEDFORD PJK DUPLE DOMINANT, 29 seater
1978 FORD R1114 PLAXTON SUPREME, 53 seater
1976 BEDFORD YMT PLAXTON SUPREME EXPRESS, 53 seater

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Preview

the doors open to board passengers. A number of suppliers will be showing their latest systems including: Uwe Verken, with perimeter systems, Eberspacher and Webasto with water preheaters and saloon heaters. Webasto also manufacture air conditioning systems, a feature which has begun to be increasingly specified in this market. Air conditioning specialists Sutrak, recently acquired by Carrier, also have a stand and will be highlighting its extended range of products. A more recent newcomer to the market, Diavia, also has a range of suitable systems for minibus application.

Lowerable air suspension has been a popular choice with many operators not wanting the expense or sophistication of a passenger lift. The air systems not only give improved ride and stability, they allow the back of the vehicle to drop almost to floor level where a simple, cheap and effective ramp can then be employed to load or unload passengers. Drinkwater Chassis Engineering will be showing its own specialised system which is supported by the Dunlop ECAS control system, and vehicle operator/builder AMK will be promoting its Gliderite system which it fits to its own conversions.

Safety specialists Unwin will be providing a comprehensive display of its passenger security devices, tracking, wheelchair restraints, clamps and other items. Q-Straint, also a major player in wheelchair security, will be promoting its own unique system.

Essential to many accessible vehicles is the passenger lift and there will be a fair selection to examine. PLS will be highlighting the stainless steel version of its Access lift. This has identical functions to its predecessor but is designed for more durability in adverse conditions. One of the company's side lifts will be shown on a Mercedes Vito, also fitted with an Extra-Step, and the latest addition to the line-up - PLS EAT M2 tested minicoach seats.

Ricon is launching its new Eclipse II, a fully automatic underfloor lift which is priced to compete head-on with the competition. Wilkes Mobile will highlight its Hideaway underfloor lift. Ratcliff were unable to provide any information on new product although its RUL 300A is sure to appear.

Safe vehicle operation is promoted by Brigade Electronics with its reversing warning systems that alert drivers when there are obstacles and warn pedestrians when vehicles are manoeuvring. Proximeter also has reversing warnings and recently added a camera/monitor system to its portfolio. The latest product from the company is a pressure sensitive door edging strip that prevents inadvertent closure on passengers.

As with other CTA exhibitions, there is likely to be a static external display of lowfloor buses. Both East Lancs and Marshall traditionally send a representative vehicle although nothing has been confirmed this year. The exhibitors mentioned above are not a comprehensive round-up and there will be plenty more to look at than has been mentioned. Audio specialists Autosound, insurers Bayliss & Cooke and Bernard J Knibbs, seat belt manufacturers and installers CSPL, Securon, Elite, Safetex and many others are all taking part in the year's premiere accessible transport exhibition.

By Martin Cole

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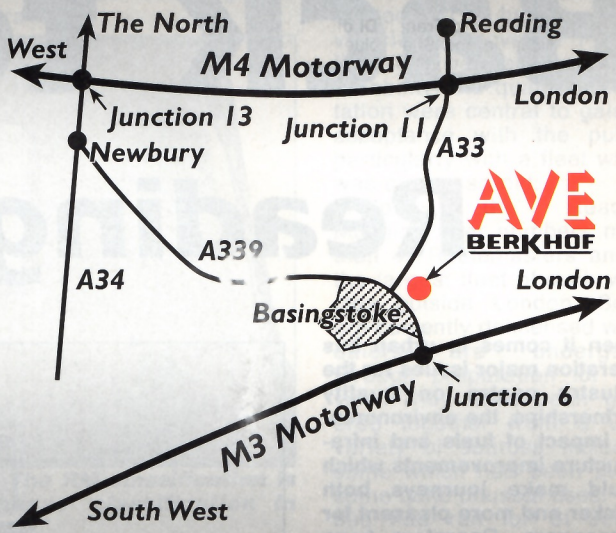

USED COACHES

1997 LEYLAND DAF CRYSTALS CONVERSION, 16 seats, seat belts, radio/tape, grey/blue interior, exterior white.....**£16,000**

1995 DENNIS JAVELIN BERKHOF EXCELLENCE 1000, 53 recliners, double glazing, crew seat, rear continental door, exterior blue / white / gold, MoT 26/11/97 .....**£109,500**

1995 MERCEDES 814D AUTOBUS CLASSIQUE, 33 seats, seat belts, power door, rear boot, tinted windows, radio/tape/PA, interior grey, exterior white/blue/gold, MoT 5/11/97.....**£59,500**

1994 MERCEDES 814 OPTARE STARIDER COACH, 29 seats, rear boot, inswung door, seat belts all seats, tinted windows, forced air, luggage racks, carpet, curtains, radio/tape/PA, new test.....**£43,000**

1991 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, 53 recliners, seat belts all seats, double glazing, adjustable footrests, ZF auto gearbox, exterior white/blue/red, interior brown/orange, MoT 11/12/97 .....**£73,000**

1989 SCANIA K112 PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500, 51 recliners, crew seat, double glazed, Telma, sunken toilet, centre continental door, fridge, boiler, splitter gearbox, fawn/orange interior, exterior white/lilac/pale yellow, MOT 12/2/98.....**£67,500**

1989 LEYLAND TIGER PLAXTON DERWENT, 53 coach seats, rear boot, exterior white, MoT 13/4/98.....**£45,000**

1989(Dec) VOLVO B10M IKARUS BLUE DANUBE, 53 recliners, crew seat, double glazing, radio/tape/PA, fawn interior, exterior white. MoT 9/98 .**£52,500**

1988 LEYLAND TIGER 290 DUPLE 340, 55 recliners, seat belts all seats, radio/tape/PA, Telma retarder, drivers fan, rear continental door, Cummins L10 engine, manual gearbox, grey interior, white/red/green/grey exterior, MoT 2/2/98.....**£49,000**

1988 DENNIS JAVELIN DUPLE 320, 55 fixed seats, seat belts all seats, Express power door, radio/tape/PA, [illegible] front screens, grey/rosewood interior, exterior white/dark and light grey, MoT 3/4/98.....**£39,500** SOLD

1987 (OCT) FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA CARLYLE, 20 seat + 4 standees bus, moquette seats, fawn/orange interior, exterior white, MoT 18.9.98.**£3,750**

1987 VOLVO B10M VAN HOOL ALIZEE, 53 recliners, double glazing, side window blinds, Telma retarder, crew seat, grey/blue interior, exterior white, unsignwritten, MoT 24/7/98 .....**£59,500**

1986 MAN 16.280 BERKHOF ESPRITE, 49 recliners, crew seat, continental door, double glazing, Peage window, interior grey/red, exterior blue/white **£25,000**

1986 LAG PANORAMIC, 49 recliners, centre continental door, sunken toilet, seat belts, water boiler, radio/tape/PA, drvers bunk, interior grey/red, exterior white, MoT 4/8/98 ...**£35,000**

1985 BEDFORD YNT DUPLE LASER II, 53 seats, crew seat, power door, side lockers, seat belts all seats, fawn interior, exterior cream/green/orange, MoT 20/1/98.....**£15,000**

1984 NEOPLAN SKYLINER, 77 seats, crew seat, toilet, water boiler, 2 tables lower deck, grey interior, exterior white/mauve/pink, MoT 6/2/98 .....**£29,500**

1983 LEYLAND TIGER PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500, 48 recliners, crew seat, rear continental door, seat belts all seats, sunken toilet, interior fawn/brown/red, exterior deep cream/orange/green, MoT 2/11/97.....**£25,000**

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Back to basics

Reading Mainline

When it comes to urban bus operation major issues for the industry centre on quality partnerships, the environmental impact of fuels and infrastructure improvements which could make journeys both quicker and more pleasant for passengers. Operators have become very conscious of how they are perceived and are keen to offer a travelling environment which attracts people away from their cars. Being seen to be in tune with public expectations is important in the battle to move the transport debate in favour of public transport.

Bus lanes may be one answer. However when the question came up during a meeting with the local authority in 1989, Reading Transport's then Traffic Manager, Mike Russell, argued that commercial speed was the real key to providing a better service, and that the operator could do more itself to achieve this. Mike is a passionate believer in public transport. He started his career with Reading as a trainee in 1966 at a time when it still operated trolleybuses. Apart from a five year stint with Swindon he had spent his entire working life working for Reading.

In 1990 Mike accepted a redundancy package at a time when he felt ill at ease with the way new management at the municipality were responding to the post deregulation environment. Weaned on the public service ethos of public transport he sees no reason to turn his back on good practise from the past and made it clear when he left Reading Transport that he reserved the right to set up his own operation in the town.

Today Mike Russell is Managing Director of Reading Mainline, a company he started three years ago with two like-minded colleagues formerly with Reading Transport. It's an operation which prides itself on frequencies, short journey times, low fares and friendly staff - goals which most forward thinking operators strive for. Yet rather than looking to new technology, low floors and infrastructure improvements, Reading Mainline depends for its success on a fleet of elderly, but immaculately turned out, former London Transport Routemaster buses. It may seem an unlikely tool, but its one which has brought the company some success.

Part of the fleet at Cardiff Road. No31 is the Routemaster still owned by its preservationist owner.

Smartly turned out, one of the early Routemasters.

The philosophy

Commercial speed is central to Mike's approach. He argues that it's the amount of revenue that a bus can generate in an hour which is key to profitability. The vehicle should be on the move, generating custom with shorter journey times and, by covering the ground, picking up more passengers. The solution, he argues, can lie with a front engined crew operated double decker which is quick in an urban environment, manoeuvrable and offers min-

imal dwell times at stops. He points out that back in the days when Reading operated crew deckers, buses could travel ten miles in an hour. With the introduction of single person working, he observed that this had fallen to an average of 8.4 mph. On the key route 17 corridor it was as low as 7.42 mph. What was worse was that, with increased traffic flows, the public's perception of the town's buses was that they were getting slower. Mike observed that between 1967 and 1989 the undertaking had consistently carried around 27 million passengers a year, but each bus was having to cover ever greater distances to maintain loadings pushing up the cost per mile all the time and resulting in disproportionate fares increases.

Mainline developments

In 1994 Mike Russell and colleagues Jeff Stoute and John Perrett, launched Reading Mainline. Financial backing for the new operation came from many sources including individuals both in and outside the industry who sympathised with the style of the new company's operations. Mike estimates that prior to the registration of the first service, some 85 people had been involved in the preparations yet their plans were kept secret throughout. Reading Transport knew competition was to start because Mike went to see his old employer in April, the day before the O-licence application appeared in Notices and Proceedings, to let them know his intentions.

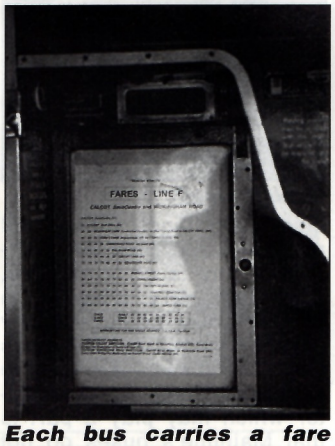
The Greater Reading Omnibus Company, as the new business was officially called, had not been the first to use the Routemaster as a competitive tool. In the fluid market conditions created after bus deregulation in 1986 it had been used by operators up and down the country as a means of both protecting and attacking markets. On the road it has all the advantages of minibuses but offers more capacity as well as the friendly service associated with conductor operation. Possibly the most notable example of their use was in Glasgow where the Scottish Bus Group used Routemasters in an abortive attempt to undermine the business of Strathclyde Buses. Hull, Manchester, Southend, Burnley, Blackpool, and various parts of the Stagecoach empire saw Routemaster operation but the elderly buses were seen by most as a short term solution.

The Reading Mainline fleetname. The RM classification is purely coincidental with the buses' classification in London.

Mike admits that he had no prior experience of the type personally, but he believed it to be ideally suited to the kind of urban operation which he wanted to run. If he could have bought vehicles of this configuration which were just ten years old then he would have done so. Rear engined buses were not suitable, he pointed out, because the conductor would spend most of his time chatting to the driver as well as blocking the entrance.

Routemasters lined up at Cardiff Road.

Despite the fact that most of his fleet is more than 35 years old his respect for the buses has continued to grow. 'They're indestructible,' he said. The importance of getting the engineering side of the operation right was one that the three partners understood from the start. Engineering Director Jeff Stoute had built up a detailed knowledge of the vehicle during his 20 years with London Transport before joining Reading in 1986. He insisted that when the first route was started that he had four spare vehicles to cover a PVR of five. The partners knew that reliability and quality presentation were central to gaining acceptance with the public, particularly with a fleet which was clearly so old.



Each bus carries a fare table.

Reading Buses and Reading Mainline.

Today the Reading Mainline fleet numbers more than 40 Routemasters and is the largest fleet of such vehicles outside London. Some are currently delicensed while others are undergoing through preparation for service. They have been gathered together from a wide variety of sources including some which had been put to some quite unusual uses. One bus had ran for St John's Ambulance Brigade for many years has been fully refurbished back to Class 6 while another, which travelled to Egypt, has acted as a valuable source of spares. One vehicle is on loaned from its preservationist owner Ian Hoskin, who has family connections with Reading. His bus, which had been carefully restored to a very high standard, needed little attention prior to class 6 certification and is now indistinguishable from the rest of the fleet in Mainline livery. Some buses came from Strathtay Scottish and as part of the deal those which had been re-registered will be reunited with their original registrations as and when they enter service.

The majority of the fleet is powered by AEC AV590 engines although several have Leyland units. Leylands have increased recently with the acquisition of Blackpool's Routemaster fleet. The partner's preference is for AEC because of its performance, durability and the ready availability of spares, although obtaining them for Leylands has not proved difficult either.

Each bus is smartly painted in a version of the old Tilling Brighton Hove & District colours of red and cream with black lining out. It's a traditional livery which suits the lines of the buses well but allows attention to detail reflected in the care taken over maintenance. Mike pointed out that transfers are used rather than vinyls, because he believes they give a better finish. Each bus is fully blinded on all apertures using Dayglo blinds and even

the under canopy slip boards are used to good affect. Mainline has its own radiator badges to the original AEC design, and London style running numbers are used on the vehicles for scheduling purposes. Faretables for the routes (appropriately Mainline call them lines) to which particular buses are allocated are located in the stairwell. If the vehicle is working an 'Extra' it's clearly blinded as such, Mike arguing that passengers can then see that the company is providing additional services to meet demand.

Building a network

Mike's many years experience of Reading's travel patterns has played an important part in the success of Reading Mainline. As well as understanding the need to improve journey times he also recognised the importance of cross town services. New office developments had resulted in many passengers wanting to travel through from their homes to work on the other side of the central area. Having to make two bus journeys in each direction discouraged ridership. The objective behind Mainline was to draw up a business plan offering something both distinctive and clearly different. Mike is quite clear that in starting this kind of venture, you had to be prepared to risk everything. The local market can sustain two urban operators, he argues, and believes that the Mainline network has offered a range of new travelling opportunities.

Careful planning was, and is, a key element in the company's approach. The partners even checked that Sheffield based Mainline had no objections to the 'Mainline' name being used in Reading. Consideration was also given to Reading Transport's ability to employ conductors on common sections of route baring in mind vehicle interworking between services. Even so, the days before the launch of the first service on the 23 July 1994 were hectic, not least because of finding suitable premises for an operating centre. Transfers were applied and blinds were only fitted to the buses the evening before the start. However the partners were encouraged by the fact that in the first week of operation they took the revenue they had planned for.

Route A runs between Turnham's Farm via the Oxford Road and town centre through to Whitley Wood. A 20 minute frequency is provided from seven in the morning until seven at night Monday to Saturday. Mike underlines the importance of estate penetration to revenue generation, something which is becoming less easy with residential parking and objections to the siting of bus stops outside homes. The manoeuvrability of the Routemasters and their ability to load and unload

Mike Russell.

quickly combined with a hail and ride operation has dispelled any such problems, and been very effective in Whitley where he says loyalty to the company's buses has been built up along the Blandford Road. Another factor which may play a part is that Mainline's buses do not operate in the evenings or Sundays when residential parking is at its height. In October the B was introduced, effectively a short working of the A giving a ten minute frequency between Norcot Junction, (later extended to Tilehurst Triangle), Reading town centre and South Reading Community Centre.

21 January 1995 saw the start of the E between Tilehurst Triangle and Addington Road via the town centre past the Royal Berkshire Hospital. As well as providing 'door to door' access to the hospital from the western suburbs the new route tapped into the inner urban residential area around Addington Road. The service was later extended at the Tilehurst end. Initial frequen-

Working through the town centre.

cies were every 30 minutes, but this was increased to 15 minutes by the end of the year. The choice of the letter E indicated that the Mainline network had been carefully planned. The order routes were introduced depended on how the partners saw the commercial opportunities. Mike pointed out that prior to the E, the hospital was only served by two buses an hour which passed close by. Now, following Mainline's service and Reading Transport's response, there are 12 which pass the door.

One of the Leyland engined Blackpool buses in service.

Route H between Hemdean Road, Caversham and Cressingham Road started on 14 May 1995 offering another cross town facility linking Caversham with Whitley. Again Mainline took advantage of the Routemaster's manoeuvrability by using a turning circle reactivated for minibuses in the 1990s at the southeast end of the route. It had been originally built for Crossley double deckers after the war. However some journeys have since been extended into Lower Earley. Further expansion followed in December 1995 with an extension of the E and with the introduction of the F serving Southcote estate, Frilsham Road and Wokingham Road the following May. Not happy with performance, the F was revised to give better penetration of the Southcote Estate. In September it was extended into the hilly Calcot Estate and on to the SavaCentre and Calcot Coachway in Bath Road. April this year saw the start of the C between Reading Station and Woodley.

Nominally Mainline's PVR now stands at 22 although 45 buses are on the books. Mike estimate's that, at a push, the rented premises in Cardiff Road could accommodate up to 60 Routemasters. Running repairs are carried out on site while the BRS depot next door undertakes fleet inspections under a contract maintenance agreement. More major work is carried out by a firm in High Wycombe. The company's costs are calculated by the hour and buses are scheduled to cover, on average that all important 10 miles an hour. In the case of the extended H its 11 miles.

Setbacks

In mid-1995 the company faced its first set back, difficulty in recruiting enough staff. It was a problem which re-emerged in May 1997. Recruiting the right kind of people has been a consideration since the planning stage and as the business has become more established, so the quality of staff has improved. The personality of conductors is very important as they are both sales agents for the business and oversee safety when boarding and alighting. There is no age barrier as 51 years separate the oldest from the youngest. Mainline has a very good

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1996 N DAF SB3000WS, Van Hool Alizee H, 49R, toilet, air conditioning
1996 N EOS 90, 49R, toilet, air conditioning
1995 M DAF SB3000WS, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1995 M EOS 90, 49R, toilet, air conditioning
1995 M DAF SB3000WS, Van Hool Alizee H, 51R, toilet
1994 L EOS 90, 49R, toilet
1994 L DAF SB3000WS, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1994 L DAF SB3000WS, Van Hool Alizee H, 51R, toilet
1994 L EOS 90, 49R, toilet, air conditioning
1994 L DAF MB230LT, Van Hool Alizee H, 51R, toilet
1992 J DAF MB230LB, Van Hool Alizee H, 51R, toilet
1992 J DAF SB3000, Auto Van Hool Alizee H, 51R, toilet
1992 J DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1990 G DAF SB2300 DHS, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1989 F DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee SH, 53R
1989 F DAF SB2300, Van Hool Alizee DH, 53R
1989 F DAF SB2300, Van Hool Alizee SH, 49R, toilet
1989 F DAF MB230LT, Plaxton 3500, 51R, toilet
1989 F DAF MB230LB, Plaxton 3500, 51R, toilet
1988 E DAF MB230LT, Plaxton 3500, 53R, toilet

HIGH QUALITY USED COACHES

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1993 K SETRA S215HD, 49R, toilet, air conditioning
1993 K DENNIS, Berkhof Excellence, 51R, toilet
1993 K VOLVO B10M, Jonckheere Deauville, 53R
1992 K VOLVO B10M, Jonckheere Deauville, 53R
1992 J DAF SB2305, Plaxton 3200 DH, 53R
1992 J DAF SB2305, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1992 J DAF SB2305 DHTD Duple 320SL, 57R
1990 G DAF MB230 LT, Plaxton 3500, 49R, toilet
1990 G DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee SH, 49R, toilet
1990 G VOLVO B10M, Plaxton 3500, 51R, toilet
1990 G VOLVO B10M, Plaxton 3500, 49R, toilet
1990 G DAF SB3000, Plaxton 3500, 51R, toilet
1989 G BOVA Futura, 51R, toilet
1989 G SCANIA K113, Van Hool Alizee SH, 49R, toilet
1989 PP BOVA Futura, 49R/, toilet
1989 F DAF SB2300 Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1989 F VOLVO B10M, Plaxton 3500, 53R
1989 F DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee, 49R, toilet
1989 F VOLVO B10M, Van Hool Alizee H, 53R
1989 F DAF SB3000, Plaxton 3500, 51R, toilet
1988 F DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee SH, 49R, toilet
1988 E VOLVO B10M, Plaxton 3500, 49R, toilet
1988 PP LAG, Panoramic, 49R, toilet
1988 PP BOVA Futura, 49R/, toilet
1988 PP DAF SB3000, Van Hool Alizee DH, 51R, toilet
1988 E VOLVO B10M Van Hool Alizee H, 53R
1988 E VOLVO B10M Van Hool Alizee H 49R, toilet
1987 PP DAF SB2300, Plaxton 3500, 53R, air conditioning
1987 D DAF SB2300, Van Hool Alizee H, 49R, toilet
1987 D DAF SB2300, Plaxton 3500, 49R, toilet
1986 PP LAG Panoramic, 49R, toilet
1985 B DAF 2300 Plaxton 3200, 53E

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1992 K DAF SB220, Ikarus Citibus, 49 Str
1992 J DAF SB220, Ikarus Citibus, 42 coach seats

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safety record, important if insurance premiums are to be kept under control. Mike estimated that only about 20% of those applying for conducting job are interviewed, while just 10% are given jobs. Yet Mainline has had little difficulty recruiting conductors. The problem has been keeping enough drivers. Currently subject to review, £5.20 is paid an hour. This is significantly higher than many local coach companies, but below that on offer in some other commercial driving jobs in a local economy which has been amongst the first to recover following recession in the early 1990s. The partners, who all drive, have looked at ways to overcome the problem and this has resulted in the introduction of a time and a quarter rate for overtime and rest day working.

For bus drivers, working for Mainline does have advantages. There is no compulsory evening and Sunday working. Nor is there any need to issue fares or deal directly with the public. Many of the company's drivers are older people looking for a less stressful working day, or youngsters, some of whom started as conductors. Some drivers are enthusiasts who just enjoy driving. Mainline does undertake driver training using an ex-Chiltern Queens manual gearbox AEC Reliance hired from an employee. If he could have one, Mike would prefer a long Routemaster with high speed differential as some drivers trained by the company have used their all-classes licence to obtain better paid work elsewhere.

The human touch is not forgotten at Mainline. A bride and father once flagged down one of Mainline's buses after their wedding car broke down. They were duly deposited at the church on time after an unscheduled diversion off the usual route, an event which made the national press.

In response

Reading Transport has not been oblivious to the activities of Mainline. Its response in 1994 was immediate with the introduction of route 1 branded the Fastline and covering roughly the same roads as Mainline's A on a limited stop basis. Six new Optare MetroRiders costing around £250,000 were acquired for the service. Since then, Mike feels that the response to each new Mainline service has become more muted. Reading continues to invest in new products, notably most recently low floor Optare Excels used on services out west to the Calcot SavaCentre. 'They always look full,' commented Mike who never-the-less felt that Mainline was holding its own. Some passengers had said to his conductors that they preferred the ride quality in a Routemaster as well as the easy access and human touch. Others had commented that the number of pushchairs made getting on and off the low floor buses difficult.

On the F Wokingham Road service.

As well as employing queue fare collectors at town centre bus stops during the week day peaks and on Saturdays, Reading Transport has introduced fares promotions including selected off-peak returns and weekly tickets. Mike's view is that there is compatibility in the pricing structure of each company's standard fares although Mainline offers a lower child and first stage fare. 'Short hop fares are what makes your buses pay,' observed Mike. Reading introduced a 10% increase in fares in September and this was immediately followed by Mainline.

Routemaster front and back. The bus on the right was returned to PSV use after service with St John's Ambulance.

Friendly conductors are an important element of Mainline's business.

Part of the local scene

Mike Russell says he has no regrets and is clearly not a quitter. He mused that when Reading Mainline started one of its shareholders had said to him about his Routemaster operation, 'You will be the last, but you will also be the best.' When I put it to him that even Routemasters can't go on for ever, his view was that there was plenty of life in them yet. Mainline has no plans to try any other kind of vehicle and will stay with the classic London bus as long as the partners control the business. As far as modernising the buses is concerned, the company did buy a Routemaster which had been refurbished to LT's current standard with a Purmo heating system, but it has not proved popular so there are no plans to alter any in the existing fleet.

I asked Mike about passenger perception of the fleet. After first pointing out that most passengers get on the first bus which comes along, he observed that initially the buses were considered quaint, and certainly there were some people who said they would not be seen dead in one. Now there are plenty who are loyal travellers.

In the last full year Reading Mainline carried almost three million passengers and had a turnover of £1.3million, employing around 100 full time staff plus part timers. Mike has shown that his style of operation can be profitable. Like all good businessmen, he would not say no to the right kind of offer, but he is adamant that the type of bus used is central to the success of the business. A visitor once remarked that the company was more municipal than a municipal. It's a comment which Mike, who worked for so long in that sector, regards as a great complement.

By Andy Izatt

Mid West of Cheltenham

Nestled against the main M5 Motorway, on the outskirts of Cheltenham, the coach dealership, Mid West enjoys a favourable location which catches a great deal of passing trade from operators travelling to or from Bristol and the South West, the Midlands or Wales. Based in the same premises as Swanbrook Coaches, the sales outlet rents an office from the operator and utilises some of the yard space for its selection of used vehicles. There are usually around ten in stock at any one time.

The company was set up jointly by Malcolm Watkins and his wife, Jackie, who are 100% shareholders in the venture. The launch followed Malcolm's failed attempt to purchase Central Bus & Coach Distributors which was based at Fromes Hill in Herefordshire. Colin Bowcott, who previously worked with Malcolm at Central, is now employed as sales co-ordinator. 'Mid West has no aspirations to become a Yeates or a Kirkby,' says Malcolm, 'but we do enjoy being associated with good quality products and we offer a friendly, professional service.'

Malcolm claims the site is ideal, being less than two minutes from Junction 11, and very handy for operators to drop in on their way past. Since it started trading on 1 June 1996, Malcolm has been careful to only advertise vehicles that are actually in stock so that no callers are disappointed when they pay a visit. 'I have to admit,' he said, 'that the prospect of acting as an agent or having vehicles here on sale or return is very attractive. However, many fleets have now shed their spare capacity and want the vehicles in service all the time. To advertise those vehicles and for them not to be here without prior arrangement is not an ideal situation. We do a little sale or return business, but not much.'

Outside the new Swanbrook and Mid West offices is the new Mercedes based Solera from Optare.

Sharing the premises with an operator has a number of benefits for Mid West and for Swanbrook. Servicing, maintenance and repairs required to the sale vehicles are offered to Swanbrook first, helping to keep their own workshops busy and provide additional revenue. Work that cannot be completed in time to suit Mid West, through Swanbrook's own busy schedule being full, is then offered elsewhere. Resprays, refurbishment and re-trimming is generally carried out by Blackpool Coach Services. Although there is a great distance involved, Malcolm is satisfied that the quality of service and end results are well worth it.

The stock of secondhand vehicles held at Mid West is generally a mixture of good quality coaches and Mercedes based minicoaches. While the type and make of the full sized coaches can vary considerably, Malcolm believes the Mercedes minibus is the best type to trade on because parts are relatively inexpensive and readily available. They are also very popular in the marketplace and, when moderately priced, provide a fast-moving area of stock.

Every vehicle for sale at Mid West is ready to be placed in service immediately, having been thoroughly prepared beforehand. 'We are sometimes criticised for going too far on preparation,' said Malcolm, 'but we think it is no bad thing to err on the side of having done our job well.'

Mid West is one of the official Autobus dealers and this Nouvelle formed part of the ride and drive day.

This rings very true when operators need vehicles as emergency replacement cover for breakdowns or accidents. Coaches that are ready to roll mean that no more time is lost than is necessary. Mid West does offer hire facilities to its regular customers so it does pay to have vehicles in a state of readiness, just in case new contracts or something unforeseen crops up.

Finance facilities are available through Mid West, along with part exchanges and 'real' discounts on straight sales.

In order to address the new vehicle market, Mid West has retained the Autobus agency and can supply both Classique conversions and the coachbuilt Nouvelle models. The agreement works out well for all parties because local operators have a contact point and the Mid West dealership can offer trade-in facilities that Autobus could not. Further benefits from this association have meant that the new Optare Ferqui Solera is to be offered through the chain of Autobus dealers in addition to Optare Coach Sales. Autobus dealers will have access to the whole of the Optare range as a consequence.

The new Solera received a very warm welcome at Coach & Bus '97 and Malcolm admitted to being 'Very excited about the reaction.' On top of this, he jumped at the chance of having the Solera for two days at the end of October. Bus & Coach Buyer were invited to attend on the second of two ride & drive days which saw the number of confirmed Solera orders rise to 21. Four have been sold by Mid West, one to Commandery Coaches of Worcester, one to Aztec of Bristol, another to BTS of Swindon and the last to Bakers Dolphin of Weston Super Mare. In fact, I went on a demonstration run in the morning with Brian Reed and his associate from Bakers.

Dealer Focus

Less than two hours later, John Baker rang through and ordered a Solera for next season.

The ride & drive days proved very positive and stimulated a number of genuine enquiries about the second-hand stock as well as new Autobus conversions, coach-built minicoaches and the Solera. Malcolm had telephoned a large number of operators with the details and a great many expressed their desire to attend.

Malcolm was very impressed with the Solera, as quite clearly were the operators. He pointed out some minor details that were to be changed before production started but claimed overall he was very happy with the package. One operator had felt the vehicle could be under-geared but there is no higher ratio available for the rear axle. Optare is currently seeking advice from Mercedes Benz about the possibilities of fitting larger wheels or tyres with a different profile in case operators want a choice.

Personally, I thought the Solera rode and drove very well. Vision for the driver and passengers was exceptionally good and, for a front-engined coach, it was reasonably quiet. Gear changing was smooth and slick and the 220 odd bhp delivered by the six cylinder O1120 engine meant adequate power was always available. I considered one of the most impressive things about the body was that nothing rattled, shook or squeaked, even over some pretty rough roads. Talking to operators at the ride and drive, they were clearly impressed that not only was the appearance of the Solera attractive, the very fact that the Optare name was behind it meant there was substantial back up through Unitec in addition to the Autobus dealerships.

Mid West's Malcolm Watkins, Alan White from Autobus and Colin Bowcott also from Mid West.

Operators everywhere talk about how much they value a true midi sized coach but relatively few are sold because they cost almost the same as a full sized coach and are difficult to justify financially. Midi coaches that are not perceived as converted bread vans, mainly built on truck chassis, are generally lacking in appearance and the builder often has no network with which to provide aftersales service. Solera changes that situation and now Autobus dealers like Mid West, Frank Chandler and Connaught PSV, stand a chance of generating a higher stature in the marketplace through having something genuine to offer major coach fleets. Malcolm openly welcomes the addition of the Solera to his new vehicle line-up and sees it as a real step up for smaller dealers.

By Martin Cole

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Fleet Additions

Tillingbourne Prismas

The Cranleigh based Tillingbourne Bus Group has taken delivery of three Optare Prismas based on the Mercedes 0.405. Seating 49 with Richard's & Shaw Tempo dual purpose seating and space for up to 25 standees, the new buses will be used on services between Guildford, Cranleigh, Dorking and Redhill. As well as anti-slip floor covering, kneeling suspension is fitted.

Tillingbourne also operates five 'P' registered Optare Vectas and four Optare MetroRiders in the 68 strong fleet.

Leeds CityLink deckers

FirstBus subsidiary Leeds CityLink is in the process of taking delivery of 26 Alexander Royale bodied Volvo Olympians which cost £125,000 each. The 72 Scanflex seats are to the recently introduced FirstBus specification. Managing Director, Steve Graham commented, 'These new double deckers amount to an investment of over £3.25 million showing the commitment Leeds CityLink has to public transport in Leeds.'

Olympians for East London

Stagecoach East London has placed 38 Alexander bodied Volvo Olympians into service. The new additions, which are dual doored, have 79 seats and work into central London on service 26.

Two new Plaxton Beaver 2s on the Mercedes Vario O.814 have been introduced by Crosville Cymru for Conwy County Borough Council contracts. Both are in a yellow livery now being specified by Conwy for buses running on council tendered services. Branded the Conwyn Clipa, the routes run from Abergele to Llanwrst and Colwyn Bay.

London Central, part of the Go-Ahead Group, has introduced Northern Counties Palatine I 74 seater Volvo Olympians, part of an order for 50. The company already operates 48 similar buses delivered in 1995 and 1996.

Sister Go-Ahead company London General has 43 being delivered during this year and 27 Palatine IIs on order.

Capital investment

The 68 strong fleet of Capital Logistics Ltd has invested in four 24 seat Mercedes Vario 0.814 Plaxton Beaver 2 minibuses with luggage compartments for airline crew transportation. Features on the new additions are air conditioning and reclining seats.

Capital Logistics was recently formed through the merger of Whytes Airport Services and Capital Coaches. The business currently provides coaching services to 50 airlines at Heathrow Airport and 35 at Gatwick Airport. A DriveTech training programme has been introduced for the company's 280 drivers.

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1980 LEYLAND LEOPARD PLAXTON SUPREME IV 12M, semi-auto gearbox, 53 E-type seats in good condition, new gangway, power door, Telma retarder, MoT'd to October 1998 ..... **£6,500**

MINIBUS

1988 DODGE S56 MK II 25 SEAT DUAL PURPOSE, Northern Counties body with high-back seats, carpet to gangway, power doors, recent new gearbox, MoT'd to October 1998, finished in white ..... **£POA**

DOUBLE DECK

1976 BRISTOL VRT 3/ECW 70 SEATER, low-bridge body, just fitted with recon Gardner engine, p/steering, rexine seats, sold with new MoT **£3,950**

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74 seats, MoT March 1998, single entrance, ready to work, first registered 1980, recent engine rebuild

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3.3m 49 seats, centre toilet, servery, Air conditioning, MoT December 1998, Available early January Choice of 3 vehicles

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£22,000 ono

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or Clive Horsfield
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1983 (pp) Leyland Tiger TL 11 Plaxton Paramount 3500, manual ZF. 49 seats, sunken toilet. Recent engine rebuild & 12 month old gearbox. Tested end Aug '98 ..... **£17,500 o.n.o**
1983 (pp) Leyland Tiger TL11 Plaxton Paramount 3500, semi auto. 51 reclining seats. Exchange engine 6 months ago. Tested end July '98 ..... **£17,500 o.n.o**
1983 (Y) Leyland Tiger TL11 Duple Dominant, 11 semi auto. 53 seats, express doors, new tyres all round. Tested March'98 ..... **£7,500 o.n.o**
1982 (X) Leyland Tiger TL11 Plaxton Supreme, Paramount type rear. Semi auto. 53 belted seats. New gearbox last month. Tested Sept'98 ..... **£7,500 o.n.o**
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40 seats and 16 standees, 1st class order, long MoT
Choice of two
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· FORECOURT ·

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1984 BEDFORD YNT PARAMOUNT 3200, 57 excellent seats, with belts, very fine example from Isle of Wight, MoT 2/'98 ..... **£14,750**

1982 SETRA 215HD, 49 retrimmed seats, seatbelts, WC, drinks m/c, etc. Genuine low mileage, must be seen to be appreciated MoT 3/'98 ..... **£27,750**

1981 BEDFORD YNT DOMINANT IV, 53 good seats, power doors, MoT 1/'98 ..... **£3,950**

1981 LEOPARD DOMINANT IV, 53 seats, power doors, new MoT shortly **£5,450**

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1987 E Merc 609D - Robin Hood - 20 seats - Choice
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1990 H Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 49 Seats + WC
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1988 F DAF SER3000 Plaxton 4000 - 72 Seats
1991 J Leyland Tiger (L10) Plaxton 321 - 53 Seats - Choice
1993 K Merc 410D Autobus Classique - 16 Seats
1993 K Merc 811 Autobus Classique - 23 Seats
1983 Y Leyland Tiger D/P Para 3200 Express - 53 seats - Refurbished - Choice
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Service bus, 53 seats and 24 standees, re-panelled, excellent condition, MoT August 1998

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Fitted TV/video, centre toilet, water boiler, fridge, retarder, very clean coach inside & out, blue in colour, blue/grey interior with blue courtesy curtains, twin drivers fan, taxed, tested, ready for immediate work, any trial or inspection, 49 seats

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21 seater, all in white, MoT May 1998, recon engine, new clutch, coffee machine, must be seen

£13,995 OVNO FOR QUICK SALE

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(CAMBRIDGE AREA)

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All coaches are belted

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MERCEDES 0303, high deck (choice)
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1 x LEYLAND CUB, 1993, 32 seats
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ALL WITH CURRENT MOT'S
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1988 (PP) LEYLAND TIGER 290 (CUMMINS)/PLAXTON 3500, 49 recliners + courier + wc, seatbelts, curtains, tested April 98 .....
.....**£42,500 + VAT**

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378000K genuine, Engine Fully reconditioned. Two owner drivers from new, brakes recently relined, original seats in good condition, reclining belts, curtains, etc, used only on holidays and excusions hence the price
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£18,950 ono+ VAT for quick sale

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TV/Video, Webasto, tea machine, fridge, retarder 21 seat + courier, seat belts, very low mileage, new clutch & gearbox, new MoT
£11,750 + VAT ONO
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PSV April '98 in White
Excellent Drive
£3995+ VAT
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BOTH ONO
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£16,995 + VAT
Ring Concept Coach Craft on 0161 406 9322 Days or 0161 456 9747 eves & weekends
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FOR SALE

VOLVO
1982 B10M VAN HOOL ALIZEE, 48 reclining seats with belts, test Dec
1978 B58 PLAXTON SUPREME V, 50 seats + toilet, power door, test Dec
LEYLAND TIGER
1985 DUPLE LAZER II, 12M, power door, 53 reclining seats with belts, manual gearbox, test March 98
1985 PLAXTON SUPREME IV EXPRESS, 11M, 53 seats, plain white, test Sept 98
1983 DUPLE DOMINANT, power door, 51 seats, semi auto gearbox, test Sept 98
1982 DUPLE DOMINANT SERVICE BUS, 55 seats + 18 standees, repanelled & updated front, finished in plain white, full test
LEYLAND NATIONAL
MK II 1983, 49 seats, Gardner turbo engine, choice - full tests
MK I, 1978, 10.3M, centre door with wheelchair lift, tracking for 5 wheelchairs, 21 seats, full test
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PRIVATE PLATE, kneeling suspension, centre door with chairlift, 23 coach seats with 3 point seat belts, tracking for 5 wheelchairs, Purmo heating, Gardner turbo engine, full soft trim etc, testing now
DAF
MB 200 PLAXTON SUPREME IV, 1980, 57 seats with belts, test Nov
AEC
1979 PLAXTON SUPREME EXPRESS, 53 seats, manual gearbox, test Feb 98
BRISTOL
VRT, 1978, low height, ECW, 73 seats, Gardner engine
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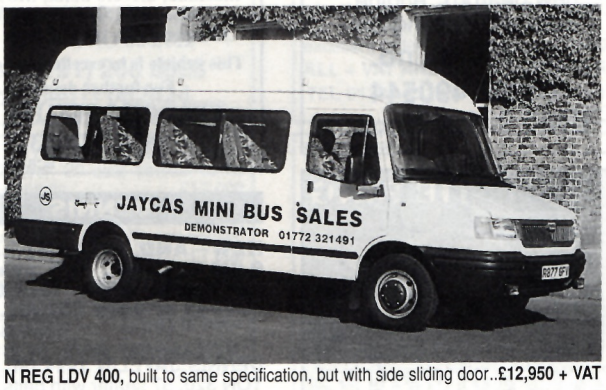

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BRAND NEW MERCEDES VITO, diesel, 7-8 seat luxury people carriers, luxury interior, lots of room, twin side loading doors, stereo, In stock now.....**£18,995 + VAT**

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M 95 TRANSIT, 8 seat luxury diesel, brand new conversion, 8 high back M2 tested seats, fully soft trimmed, superb vehicle, wheelchair facility..... .....*Choice of 2* **£10,995 + VAT**

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PLS cassette chairlift, 12-15 moquette seats on tracking, 3 point seat belts, wheelchair tracking, 4 wheelchairs folding front entry doors, saloon heater, very, very low mileages, built by Mellors, choice of 10 vehicles all with COIF, huge choice.....**from £19,995**

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1986 LEYLAND CUB, 20 seat access bus, power door, full wheelchair tracking, powered tail lift, excellent condition, full test ..... **Good value at only £4,995 + VAT**

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F 88 MERCEDES 507D, 15 seat luxury AX-5 Minicoach, newly refurbished, 15 high back seats, PLS, hidden taillift, beautiful condition ..... **£13,995 + VAT**

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H 91 TRANSIT Hi-roof, 14 seat luxury accessible minibus, superb Jubilee conversion, PLS underfloor taillift, fully tracked, 64,000 miles, COIF, excellent condition ..... **£6,995 + VAT**

F 89 RENAULT MASTER Diesel, 14 seat front entry luxury minicoach, underfloor luggage, high back coach seats with seatbelts, good condition, COIF .... **£4,995 + VAT**

E REG FREIGHT ROVER, Carlyle body, Vogel seats with belts, power door, massive boot, tested, good condition..... **£3,995 + VAT**

SOLD

86 D OPTARE CITY PACER, 25 seats, auto, velour seats, power door, certified seatbelts, reconditioned engine, full COIF, good condition ..**£5,995 + VAT**

H 91 TRANSIT Diesel, 8 seat minibus, long wheelbase, high back seats, luggage area, excellent vehicle..... **£6,995**

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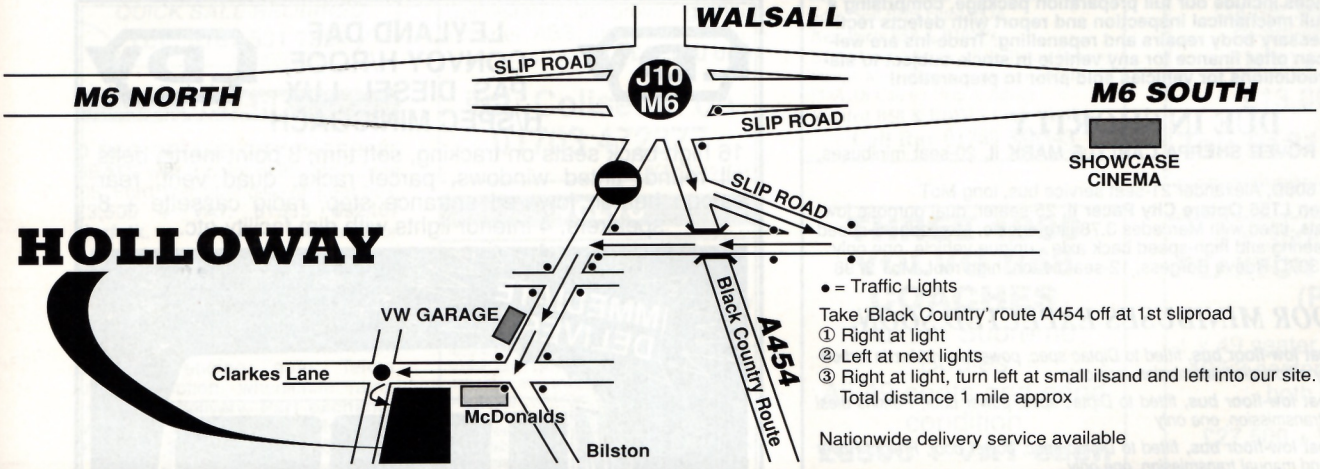

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1989 G Ford Transit Di diesel, 14-seat van conversion, PSV'd by us this year, Richards and Shaw blue/grey moquette coach seats with 3 point belts and matching front seats, radio/cassette, stainless steel wheel trims, resprayed/trimmed interior panels and new door skins this year, immaculate vehicle £5,995

1977 PP Bristol LHS6L Plaxton Supreme, 30-seat coach, Plaxton Supreme IV front, fitted with Plaxton Relaxa reclining seats with armrests, refurbished and retrimmed in brown centre pattern moquette by us in 1996, repsprayed cream by us in 1997, absolutely outstanding vehicle for year, ...£5,995

1989 F Renault S56 Mark II, East Lancs 21-seat coach Perkins 4 cylinder turbo automatic gearbox, disc brakes, retarder, price includes retrim in your choice of moquette as well as our usual preparation package, one only, ...£6,995

1987 D and E Renault S56, 19/21 seat coaches, Alexander AM type alloy bodywork automatic gearboxes, power doors, retrimmed in Holdsworth Graffitti moquette, saloon heaters, good condition, ideal dual purpose vehicles, resprayed white, one only, ...£4,995 READY NOW

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1988 F MCW Metrorider, SWB 25-seat buses, disc brakes, Cummins engines, Allison 4-speed automatics, choice of attractive brown or grey bases multicolour stripe interiors, price includes full underbody overhaul and respray in your livery as well as our usual preparation package, one only, ...£7,495

1988 E Freight Rover Sherpa 350, with Carlyle Mark II, 20-seat bus bodywork, 5 speed manual, power door, beige/orange interior, full underbody overhaul with new chassis rails and floor crossmembers, **one only MOT'd, prepared and awaiting your paint instructions,** £3,495

1987 E FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA, 20 seat bus, Carlyle Mark II bodywork, **Ford DI engine and gearbox**, and beige/orange interior, power door, price includes full underbody overhaul with new chassis rails and floor crossmembers. One only £4,695

1987 E Renault S56, Mark I, 19/21-seat buses, Alexander all alloy bodywork, saloon heaters, optional luggage pens, automatic gearboxes, choice of three, excellent value at just .....£3,695 each

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1988 E FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA CARLYLE MARK II, 20-seat minibuses, new MoT's

1984 A Mercedes 608D, Alexander 21-seat service bus, long MoT

1989 G Volkswagen LT55 Optare City Pacer II, 25-seater, dual purpose low-back individual seats, fitted with Mercedes 3.78 litre engine, Mercedes 5-speed gearbox, power steering and high-speed back axle - unique vehicle, one only

1986 C Mercedes 307D Reeve Burgess, 12-seat coach, high roof, MoT 3/'98

LOW-FLOOR MINIBUSES EXPECTED SOON:

1995 N Omni 21-seat low-floor bus, *fitted to Diptac spec, power door, Mazda turbodiesel engine and fully automatic transmission, one only*

1990 H Omni 21-seat low-floor bus, *fitted to Diptac spec, power door, Perkins diesl engine and manual transmission, one only*

1989 G Omni 21-seat low-floor bus, *fitted to Diptac spec, power door, Freight Rover turbodiesel engine and manual transmission, one only*

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1988 E RENAULT S56 MARK II Northern Counties, 25 seat bus, coachbuilt front end, Perkins 4 cylinder Phaser/automatic, long MoT, resprayed white, seat belts £4,195

1986 D FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA, 20 seat bus,Carlyle Mark I bodywork, Ford Di diesel engine and 5-speed Ford MT75 gearbox, orange/white exterior, MoT 3/'98, one only .....£2,895 each

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16 forward facing seats on tracking with l & d belts, tinted windows, saloon heater, extractor, parcel racks, stereo radio cassette, o/side emergency door. — **1 only November**

MERCEDES-BENZ VARIO 24 coach
24 seats on tracking with l & d belts, tinted windows, saloon heater, extractor, forced air ventilation/reading lights, full curtains, deep parcel racks, stereo/radio cassette, PA and hand microphone, large boot, fully skirted. — **1 only November**

MERCEDES-BENZ VARIO "NOUVELLE"
29 seat coach, courier, tracking, l & d belts, tinted windows, two saloon heaters, forced air ventilation/reading lights, full curtains, deep parcel racks, stereo radio cassette, P.A. and hand microphone, massive boot, side locker, air door. — **Last 2 Immediate**

MERCEDES-BENZ VARIO "NOUVELLE"
32 seat coach, tracking, l & d belts, tinted windows, two saloon heaters, deep parcel racks, stereo radio cassette, boot, air door. — **1 only Immediate**

"NOUVELLE 2"
29 seat executive specification with large luggage boot and locker — **1 only January 1st**
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16 high back seats on tracking, soft trim, 3 point inertia belts all round, tinted windows, parcel racks, quad vent, rear saloon heater, lowered entrance step, radio cassette + 8 speakers, 4 interior lights with dim facility etc.

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High spec, luc 16 seater minibus, high roof, dual purpose, wheelchair lift, COIF for 5 wheelchairs - 2 passengers

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One previous owner, excellent condition, regularly maintained by Volvo main agent, full service history, currently used on our own tours and excursions. 49 reclining seats, foot and arm rests, courier seat, rear sunken toilet, servery area above with enclosed hot water boiler and storage for drinks etc, video machine and monitor, retrimmed around 18 months ago in graffiti design and all seats have Inertia lap seatbelts, Telma retarder and Webasto heater. The vehicle will be available from Jan '98 and is to be sold with a new MoT. Finished in base white with some vinyl lettering.

£34,500 + VAT

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NEW TRANSIT 16 face forward luxury semi Hi-roof. 2 weeks
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NEW FORD TOURNEO, 9 seat, diesel. **Stock.**
NEW FORD TAXI BUS, 1 w/chair. **Stock**
NEW DAF CONVOY, diesel, 16 PSV, coach spec, Turbo. **Stock**
NEW DAF, 16 hi roof, Convoy. Turbo+Non Turbo **Stock.**
NEW VW Diesel, 9 seat. Taxibus. **Stock**
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93 TALBOT TRI-AXLE, 22 + Standees
91 TALBOT TRI-AXLE, 22 + Standees
90 MERC 709, 25 coach, p/door, boot
90 TRANSIT LWB, Petrol, 12 seats.
90 VAN HOOL LB10, 49, belts, fridge, toilet
90 TRANSIT, LWB 12 seat diesel PSV.
89 DAF, Algarve exec 11.6, toilet, TV, D.mount
89 B10 VAN HOOL ALIZEE Super High, 49, toilet, TV, Fridge, coffee machine
89 DUPLE 425 DAF, ZF, 7 sp, exec, 55 recl
89 SANOS EXECUTIVE, 49 + toilet + TV
89 TRANSIT 14 DIESEL, PSV
88 DAF BERKHOF SBR 3000, 75 seat exec, d/deck, toilet, monitors, tested
88 B10 PLAXTON 3500, 49/toilet
88 MERCEDES 814, 29 seat coach spec
88 FREIGHT ROVER, 20 seat Carlyle service bus
88 FREIGHT ROVER, 16 diesel, PSV coach
87 MCW METRORIDER, Perkins, 23 + 6
87 MERCEDES 814, 29 seats, P.door
87 RENAULT DODGE, S/Bus, 29 + standees
87 MERC 19 coach seats
86 VOLVO ALGARVE, retrimmed, 51+ toilet
86 MERC 608, 20 + standees
86 VOLVO B9, 33 Coach/service
86 RENAULT DODGE 25, 5 spd manual, p/door
86 RENAULT DODGE, 20 service, auto
85 DODGE PERKINS, 39 seat manual, p/door
85 SETRA, exec, 49, toilet, TV
84 DAF JONCKHEERE, 49 + toilet
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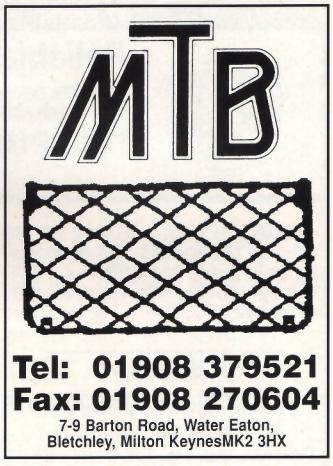

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1994 BOVA FUTURA, 49 reclining seats, centre sunken toilet, continental door, water boiler, aircraft type luggage racks, air conditioning. Interior – grey/green. Exterior – green. MoT March 1998.

1992 VOLVO B10M VAN HOOL ALIZEE DH, 48 reclining seats, rear floor mounted toilet, servery with fridge and water boiler. Interior – blue/grey. Exterior – white/blue/yellow. MoT December 1997.

1992 BOVA FUTURA FHD, 53/57 reclining seats, centre sunken demountable toilet, continental door, wired for video/monitor, driver's bunk. Interior – autumn tint. Exterior – white. MoT December 1997.

1990 DAF SB2300 JONCKHEERE DEAUVILLE, 51 reclining seats, centre sunken toilet, continental door, water boiler, wired for video/monitor. Interior – grey/maroon. Exterior – white. MoT March 1998.

1990 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON 3500, 49 reclining seats, centre sunken toilet, continental door, aircraft type lockers. Interior – brown. Exterior – white. MoT May 1998.

1988 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON 4000, 65 reclining seats, toilet, water boiler, wired for video/monitor, TELMA retarder. Interior – autumn tint. Exterior – white. MoT March 1998.

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1983 VOLVO B10M JONCKHEERE P90, 58 reclining seats, toilet, water boiler. Interior – brown. Exterior – white. MoT July 1998.

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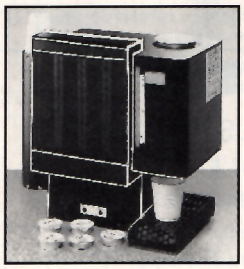

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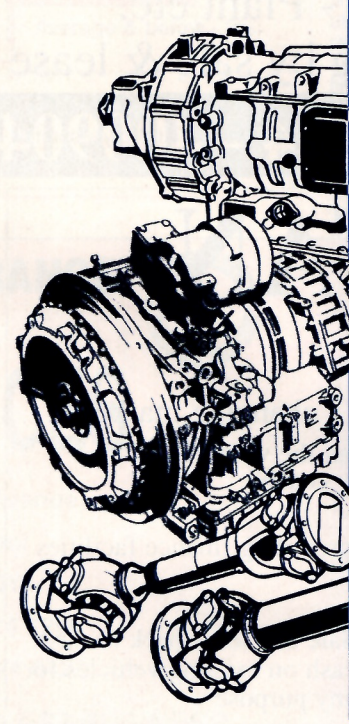

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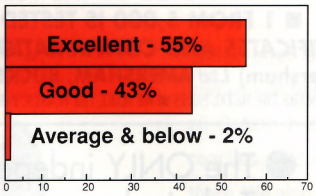

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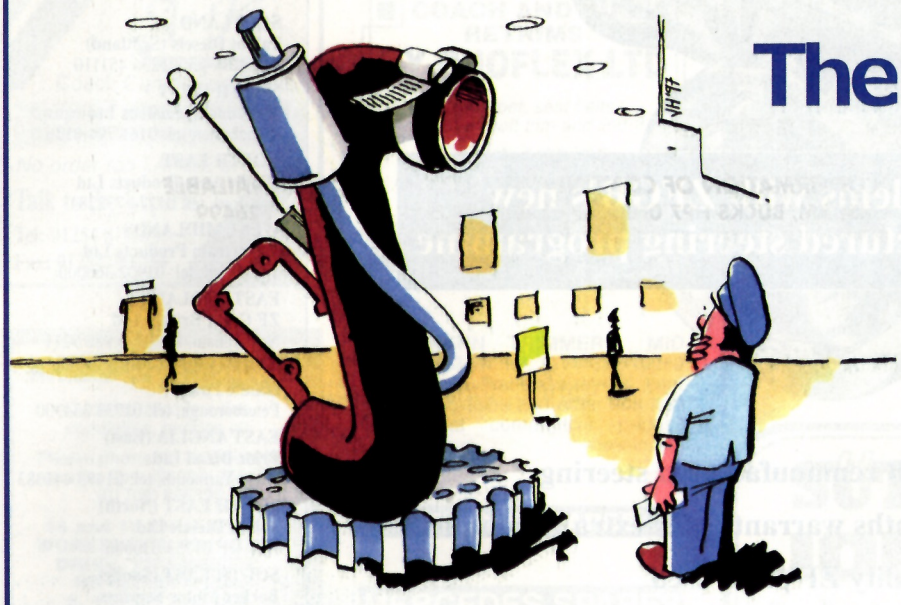

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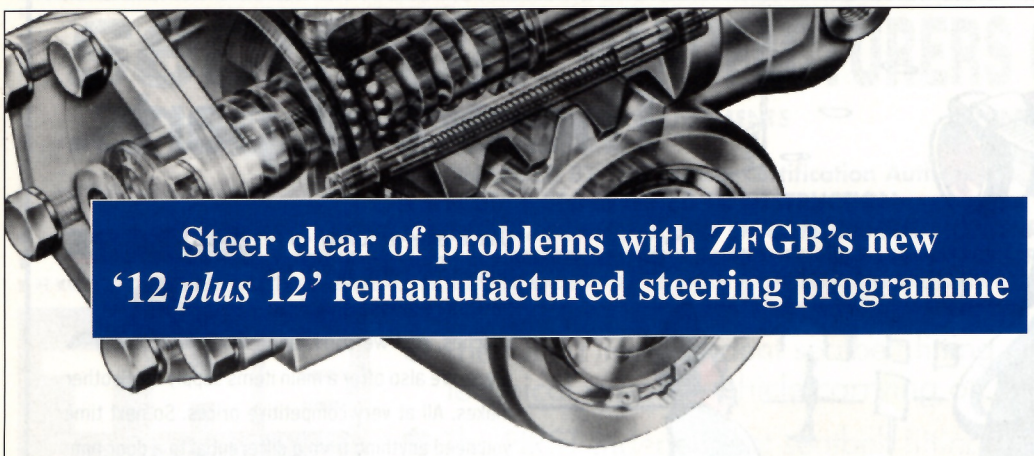

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British Car Auctions

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Products & Services

CSC family extended

Siemens Nixdorf has extended its CSC family of terminals with the addition of the new CSC/670 self-service ticketing terminal. The CSC/670 is a free-standing indoor or outdoor device for use in public transport applications. Front-loading, it's protected against damage through sealed screws, hinges, joints and openings as well as advanced locking mechanisms says the company.

The user interface panel is divided into the communication area comprising a 17" colour touch screen, ready indicator and thermal receipt printer, and the point of sale area comprising PIN keypad and hybrid card reader. The system has a footprint of approximately 1 square metre, is capable of integrating any ticket or kiosk printer says Siemens Nixdorf, and provides audio capabilities driven by dedicated electronics software. It runs the 'SSD Classic' application which is designed for a multi-tasking operating system and is currently supported by OS/2 Warp and Windows NT Version 4.0.

The company's Self-Service Line of Business supplies a range of self-service technology-based solutions including automatic teller machines, information terminals, and statement printers for market sectors such as finance, banking and transportation.

More details are available from Chris Maycock, Self-Service Line of Busines on Tel: 01344 862222.

Safe glass from Safeglass

Safeglass Europe Ltd has developed a 'safety glass' product which, when broken, breaks into harmless fragments which the company claims will not cut. The new product is not made from real glass, but is clear. Because it breaks completely there is free access to anything behind and no shards are left behind. Safeglass says that as the product contains non-toxic material it can be used in a wide variety of applications where real glass products are not suitable. Further details are available from Avril McNeill. Safeglass Europe Ltd, James Watt Building, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, G75 0QD. Tel: 01355 272438, Fax: 01355 272613.

Application of Sikaflex-254 Booster

Sikaflex booster

Sika has developed polyurethane based Sikaflex-254 Booster which the company claims reduces production time for a bonded assembly. The product is a high strength structural bonding adhesive supplied either in a cartridge or drum/hobbock pack which can be applied with a pump or hand-operated gun. Sika says that handling strength can be reached after one hour and that performance is relatively independent of temperature. They argue that while conventional two-component, chemically curing adhesives suffer from low temperature and pot life deficiencies that can detract from their performance in installation and assembly operations, electrically non-conductive Sikaflex-254 Booster has a fast cure rate, coupled with rapid strength gain throughout its applied thickness. It also offers good durability against weathering, water, weak acid and alkalis and waste water, as well as resistance to spillage of fats, fuels, mineral and vegetable oils. Sika's address is Watchmead, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL7 1BQ. Tel: 01707 394444, Fax: 01707 329129.

Don workshop range

Friction material producer Don plans to market a range of specialist workshop equipment. Included are decelerometers, calibrated air gauges sold in pairs, hand-held digital thermometers and go/no-go gauges to aid rivet hole drilling. Don argue that the equipment, which they say has been successfully applied in the field by their own engineers, will aid fault diagnosis and fleet maintenance. Senior technical engineer John Brightmore commented, 'Workshop equipment plays a critical role, identifying problems before they cause significant downtime. Even the simple checking of brake temperature with a digital thermometer can reduce the temptation to make, potentially time-wasting, assumptions or second guesses.' Further details from Don's Technical Dept: 0161 205 2371.

Fuels seminar

A one day fuels seminar will be held at Millbrook Proving Ground, Bedford on 2 December and will include papers describing the techniques used by London Transport Buses and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to assess the actual operating benefits of gas and reformulated diesels. The research included CNG, ultra-low-sulphur diesel and European-standard reduced-sulphur diesel under fully transient operating conditions and the results of these test programmes will be announced.

The seminar is supported by DETR, which will provide a presentation on fiscal and regulatory factors. The day will cost £195 plus VAT including lunch and proceedings. Places can be reserved by calling 0181 743 4224 or faxing 0181 743 3133.

LT Xmas

A range of Christmas gifts are available from the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden, London. Amongst the items available are a range of shot glasses featuring Tube slogans such as 'Hold Tight' and 'Not in Service' at £1.99 each as well as 'Help Point' and 'Way Out' aperitif glasses at £3.99. Mugs at £2.95 come with a range of slogans such as 'Mind the Gap' and 'Penalty for Improper Use £50.'

'No smoking on the Underground' Chrome cigarette lighters can be matched with a chrome cigarette case (£8.99) and portable ash tray at £4.99.

Other posibilities are 'Push Once' T-shirts or 'All zones' sleeveless T-shirts at £9.99. Tube map socks are available at £3.99 a pair while 'The Tube' pen and pencil sets are £3.50 and Tube slogan mouse mats, £6.99. Underground logo golf ball and tee sets are priced at £3.50 small or £4.99 large.

Copies of London's historic collection of posters ranging from the 1930s to 1990s are available including the latest addition, a black version of the famous Tube map at £4.99. Amongst the books stocked is Station to Station by Steven Parissien. The Museum shop is open daily until 18.00 with late night opening until 19.00, Wednesday from 19 November until Christmas. It is closed from 16.00 on 24 December to 10.00 on 27 December.

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